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## Jewish Life in the American West

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that the Irish were more likely to be farmers in Minnesota than elsewhere, the authors do not contextualize the Minnesota experience in a national setting.

"Know your audience" is the first rule of writing, and these authors follow that rule rigorously. Outstanding as a point of departure for general readers or newcomers to Minnesota ethnic history, these books effectively introduce Minnesotans to their neighbors. A similar series for Iowa would be welcome.

*Jewish Life in the American West*, edited by Ava F. Kahn. Seattle: University of Washington Press and Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2002. 144 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$22.50 paper.

Reviewer Linda M. Schloff is director of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest. Her book, *"And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher": Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest* (1996), accompanied an exhibit on the same topic that she curated at the Minnesota Historical Society.

*Jewish Life in the American West* is a companion to an exhibit of the same name that appeared at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage in Los Angeles. Heavily illustrated, the book's essays offer new perspectives on the history of the American West and cover topics that are only suggested in the exhibit.

In her introductory essay, Ava Kahn gives a brief historical tour of Jewish migration to the West (defined as anything west of the Mississippi River) and settlement between 1860 and 1920. She enumerates the ways Jewish settlement in the West differed from that of the rest of the country. San Francisco rather than New York, for example, was the major entrepôt; by the 1880s it had the second-largest Jewish population in the United States.

Hasia Diner's provocative essay, "American West, New York Jewish," explores the paradox of American Jewish history being written as if the New York experience was the only authentic one, while Jews who took part in the western migration were perceived as somehow more American. As Moses Rischin comments in the afterword, "Jews have opted for 'American West, New York Jewish'" in order "to have it both ways" (136).

Ava F. Kahn's essay on four Jewish women's lives conveys the diversity of their experiences, their ability to adapt, and extremes of social mobility. It is refreshing to be reminded that not all Jewish women worked in sweatshops.

William Toll, one of the finest social historians of the western Jewish experience, uses an astonishing variety of sources to draw a picture

of Jewish merchant life revealing migration patterns, demography, family relationships, and social networks, as well as civic and communal involvement in selected western towns. In doing so, he conveys these merchants' rapid social mobility and civic acceptance.

Ellen Eisenberg's subject is farming. She uses Joseph Nudelman's recollections to explore Jewish agricultural colonies and to argue that although the colonies were failures economically, the experience provided the participants with the tools for urban leadership.

I have a couple of reservations about the book. The first concerns the elastic use of the word *West*, when so many of the essays are clearly about areas west of the Rocky Mountains. Second, I would suggest that the transformative experience came not so much from having happened in the West, wherever that is, but rather from the timing of arrival. The earliest Jewish settlers of South Carolina, for example, also experienced social integration, entrepreneurial success, and relative isolation from other Jews. The same characteristics could no doubt be found in other parts of the country.

Nonetheless, these fine essays add to our knowledge of the complex ethnic and religious mix in the West and certainly contribute to the growing subfield of western Jewish history, but they do not really answer the question of how significant the impact of region truly is.

*Railroads and American Law*, by James W. Ely Jr. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001. ix, 332 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer Michael A. Ross is assistant professor of history at Loyola University New Orleans. He is the author of several articles (including two in the *Annals of Iowa*) about U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Freeman Miller.

In the nineteenth century the rise of railroads led to profound changes in American law. As the nation's first big business, the railroads forced jurists and legislators to confront complex questions involving labor relations, taxation, eminent domain, racial segregation, interstate commerce, corporate responsibility, and the reach of the national government. New laws had to be passed, new legal doctrines formulated. Few aspects of the law were left untouched.

In *Railroads and American Law*, James Ely provides a masterful one-volume synthesis of this massive topic. He cogently summarizes the voluminous scholarship on the history of railroad law (on how the law was both created and interpreted) and offers his own nuanced assessments of the key historical debates. Writing in language that is moderate and clear, he avoids the ideological extremes that have often domi-

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